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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT REVERSES COURSE AFTER PRESIDENT THREATENS TO RESIGN

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¶1. (SBU) President Jose Ramos-Horta threatened to resign as Timor-Leste's president on September 9 unless the national parliament reversed its vote disapproving of his planned travel to the United States for the UN General Assembly. The parliament, with unclear constitutional authority, voted against the president's proposed trip on September 8 as a protest against the government's decision to release indicted militia leader Martenus Bere to Indonesian custody on August 30. The Parliament took a second vote the afternoon of September 9 and approved the president's travel, although several parliamentarians reportedly took the decision under duress and only in the "interest of the state."

¶2. (SBU) Ramos-Horta summoned the diplomatic corps at 5:00 PM on September 9 (which had been his deadline for the parliament to approve his travel) to inform them of his resignation threat and to criticize unwelcome intervention on the Bere case from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and international NGOs. Ramos-Horta, barely suppressing his anger, told diplomats the parliament was "playing with fire" by playing political games with him. This parliament was corrupt and ineffective, Ramos-Horta charged, and needed to be cleaned up and "taught a lesson" in the coming months. Despite the parliament's reversal, Ramos-Horta insisted "this isn't over" and hinted at exercising his presidential prerogative to dissolve parliament and call early elections or resign before the end of his term. The president stated his intention to hold a press conference the evening of September 9 to reveal publicly his resignation threat and to identify the "irresponsible" politicians who had insulted the dignity of his office, with the expectation that the people would be angered at the treatment he had received and frightened at the prospect of losing him as president.

¶3. (SBU) Ramos-Horta sharply criticized a September 2 letter released publicly by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, questioning the government's handling of the Bere case. Ramos-Horta rhetorically demanded to know who had authorized such a letter and promised to respond directly only to the UN Secretary General and the UN Security Council. He questioned

the need for a representative of the human rights commissioner to be resident in Timor-Leste - a country which has ratified "all of the human rights treaties" - and criticized the United Nations for its "hypocrisy" in failing to prosecute human rights violators or establish an international tribunal while it still had executive authority in Timor-Leste up to 2002.

¶4. (SBU) The president urged diplomatic missions to refrain from instigating critical commentary from international NGOs and to convince parliamentarians to "stop playing games." He praised Portugal, Brazil, and Spain for not lecturing Timor-Leste on the issue of justice. Ramos-Horta accused the international community of not understanding the situation in Timor-Leste and not appreciating the fruits enjoyed by Timor-Leste as a result of its non-confrontational approach toward Indonesia, citing a stable border (despite the presence of thousands of former East Timorese militia in West Timor), preferential access for Timorese students in Indonesian universities, and Indonesia's support for Timor-Leste's ASEAN membership. If we listened to the international community, Ramos-Horta concluded, Timor-Leste would be much worse off.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: Ramos-Horta sees himself as above local politics and as an indispensable guarantor of stability in the country. Ramos-Horta has taken the parliament's vote as a personal affront and may also be using his threat to resign as a way to end the growing criticism of the government's decision to release Bere. This latest development indicates that the ongoing controversy surrounding the Bere case is continuing to exacerbate partisan politics.

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¶6. (SBU) COMMENT (cont): The processing of the legal case against Bere continues to evolve. Currently, responsibility lies with the Prosecutor-General (a member of the opposition Fretilin party). The Prosecutor-General has already determined that Bere remains a Timorese citizen, is checking the validity of the outstanding arrest warrant, and is traveling to Suai on September 10 to examine the documents pertaining to the case.
HENICK